

AB 374

California Compassionate Choices Act: Separating Fact from Fiction

Fiction: Physician Assisted Dying will lead to many Californians prematurely ending their lives.

FACT: The Act applies only to the terminally ill, and while many are comforted by having the choice, a very small number exercise that choice. Oregon has had a similar law on the books for eight years, and government reports show that very few people use the Act, and they receive appropriate care and screening. Since 1997, 390 patients in Oregon have obtained the prescription and only 246 terminally ill patients have chosen to ingest it.

Fiction: This would prevent patients from being able to fully trust their doctors when they become seriously ill.

FACT: This Act prohibits doctors from prescribing this medication without the patient requesting it twice. And no single doctor can act alone - two physicians must evaluate a patient prior to filling a prescription. This Act only allows doctors to respond to the dying wishes of their patients.

Fiction: Crooked doctors will use this to kill poor people, the disabled, and minorities.

FACT: Only the terminally ill are eligible to exercise this end of life choice. Disability is not an eligible condition, nor is poverty nor racial ethnicity. This is a perception based purely on fear, which is not substantiated by any data. Empirical studies and nonpartisan state data demonstrate that built-in safeguards effectively shield patients from abuse, and that the narrowly crafted law is working as it was intended.

Fiction: There is no need for this legislation.

FACT: Californians receive aid-in-dying all the time - without safeguards or protections. Studies of physician practices in the United States show a measurable, fairly consistent incidence of assisted dying, legal or not. And the methods often used today to hasten death may take weeks to actually end someone's life.

Fiction: HMOs will save money by convincing patients to end their lives.

FACT: Patients typically exercise their right to die only after all treatment options have been exhausted. Hospice care is a Medicare benefit, and not managed by HMOs.

Fiction: Family members, caregivers and guardians can use this to prematurely end a patient's life, particularly when there are large estates on the line.

FACT: Under this law, only a patient can request the prescription and only a patient may administer the prescription - no one can assist.

Fiction: Californians aren't ready to give patients this choice.

FACT: The most recent Field Poll on this subject (2006) found that 70% of all Californians believe that incurably ill patients should have the "right to ask for and get life-ending medication."

Fiction: Doctors in Oregon are not screening for depression or mental illness.

FACT: The screening process works. In fact, one in six patients seeking this option was rejected because of physicians' concern about their mental capacity.